

Dear State Board of Education Members:

(Please extend this message to those who do not have an SBE or other direct e-mail address, including all the students—thanks.)

At your meeting this week, you will be presenting a summary of a meeting of “Diverse Stakeholders” which includes some interesting and valuable insights. However, we were surprised by a couple of important features about that meeting and its outcome. Many important groups were invited, but we were not among them. This would have been less surprising had the invitee list not included other strong lobby and political advocacy groups such as LEV and Stand for Children.

Where was the group that represents teachers, para educators, librarians, counselors or any of the other essential staff that are represented by WEA-- an organization that has over 84,000 members, all in education and all of them serving our diverse students in ELL, special education, and students of every color, creed, sexual orientation and economic status all across the state?

Perhaps it is not well known that WEA has very strong and active participation on issues of diversity in our state. Here are a few of the things we do and participate in:

- Partnership with and sponsorship of many Communities of Color organizations, efforts (e.g., One America focus groups with WEA ELL teachers) and events
- Full-time Human Civil Rights Coordinator position
- Future Native Teachers Initiative (GF grant-funded)
- Teaching Equity Conference
- Cross-cultural Competency Training
- Culturally Responsive Instructional Strategies (CRIS) Training
- English Language Learner (ELL) Training
- Human/Civil Rights Conference for Educators of Color
- The organization's Human and Civil Rights Committee
- Support for regional Minority Action Committees and Conferences (e.g., SW WA Diversity Conference) in various districts throughout the state

It would have been most appropriate to have invited someone from our organization to this discussion—and all the more so as anti-union, anti-collective bargaining statements were elevated to its own section in the minutes, against which there was no union presence to respond or object. We object to this inequitable approach to “stakeholder input” when the group that represents school employees and their union is excluded while other groups who often espouse positions unsympathetic to those employees’ unions are invited and provided a legitimate platform.

And we object to your publicizing a document that addresses union issues in a negative way when no one from the union was invited to participate. Everyone has a right to free speech and opinions, but slurs and swipes against any group, especially when that group is not present or invited, does not speak well of the State Board of Education and it does not show genuine support of tolerance and diversity.

If you are truly interested in getting stakeholder input from representative and diverse groups that can provide the board with fair and valuable information, we suggest that you not exclude those most involved in the work of creating an excellent education for all our

students. Teachers and school employees continue to feel alienated by the work of this board and it is this very sidelining of our organization and lack of respect for the voices of our members that perpetuates that feeling.

Thank you for your time,

Wendy Rader-Konofalski
WEA Lobbyist
724 Columbia St. N.W. suite 220
Olympia, WA 98501
cell: 206 300-1682
office: 253 765-7152

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